

# Classroom Activity Breaks

We have long known the benefits that exercise has on the physical body. We're now discovering more about the link between movement and learning. Physical activity is essential for student achievement. Studies show a connection between physical activity and increased levels of alertness, mental function and learning. Physical activity increases blood flow to the brain, which brings more oxygen, water, and glucose to feed the brain, while releasing endorphins, which have a positive effect on mood.

Eric Jensen, in *Learning with the Body in Mind*, tells us that sitting for just 10 minutes at a time increases fatigue and reduces concentration and attention. This often results in behavior problems for children. By contrast, most of the brain is activated during physical activity and "the complex interplay between mind and body...engages the learning brain."

The evidence is fascinating. Rae Pica, a children's physical activity specialist highlights The Finland Story:

- In Finland, children don't start formal schooling until they're seven years old. Until then, they learn through play.
- Once in school, they take a 15-minute break after every 45 minutes of instruction.
- They receive physical education. They also have art and music.
- Finnish students leave school knowing three languages.
- Schooling is such a positive experience for them that there are too many individuals who want to be teachers.
- Finland is #1 in the world in literacy and numeracy!

With limits on recess and PE classes in many schools, it is becoming more difficult for children to get all the physical activity they need. Children should accumulate a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week. The good news is that physical activity does not have to be strenuous and does not have to be done all at one time to be beneficial. Getting short bursts of activity adds up.

One way to reach this goal is to take 3 to 5 minute activity breaks in the classroom several times a day. Classroom activity breaks offer students a chance to participate in a fun activity while enjoying social interaction. We recommend taking a classroom activity break after 50 minutes of continuous sitting or during transitions between subjects. Emphasize to the class that the activities usually last 3 to 5 minutes. If time is wasted getting ready, little time will be left for activities.

The following pointers will help you implement classroom activity breaks more efficiently:

- The activities should require a minimum of instruction. Start the activity as quickly as possible. If students don't understand it after a few moments, stop and clarify any issues.
- The idea of the activity is to get children moving in an orderly fashion in the classroom. If some students choose not to participate in an acceptable manner, remove them from the activity. Noise should be minimized.
- Assure that all students are integrated into the activities so they feel an integral part of the class and receive their share of activity.
- Ask PE teacher if he or she can help in getting started.

Ideas for classroom activity breaks are available from several sources. Here are a few:

- [www.jamschoolprogram.com](http://www.jamschoolprogram.com) Sign up for JAMmin Minutes, a free one minute exercise routine emailed to you every week. Or download JAMmin Minutes from the past year at <http://www.healthetips.com/archive.php>
- [Energizers : Classroom-based Physical Activities](#) Simple and fun ways to integrate physical activity with academic concepts
- [www.activeandhealthyschools.com](http://www.activeandhealthyschools.com) Click on Program Materials to order laminated classroom activity cards and more.
- [www.extension.missouri.edu/explore/shop](http://www.extension.missouri.edu/explore/shop) Product # N862 is a set of over 70 laminated physical activity cards developed by the University of Missouri Extension Family Nutrition Education Program.